

Message Text

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ACTION AF-10

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FM AMEMBASSY COTONOU

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 0387

C O N F I D E N T I A L COTONOU 0131

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PDIP, DM, US

SUBJ: BENIN AUTHORITIES SEEK TO INSPECT CHANCERY BUILDING

1. CHARGE WAS CALLED TO FOREIGN MINISTRY JANUARY 27 BY DIRECTOR GENERAL WHO INFORMED HIM THAT GOVERNMENT OF PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF BENIN (GPRB) WOULD LIKE TO CONDUCT "TECHNICAL INSPECTION" OF EMBASSY CHANCERY. DIRGEN STATED THAT THESE INSPECTIONS WERE BEING CARRIED OUT IN ALL THE BUILDINGS SURROUNDING THE MILITARY CAMP. HE WISHED TO CONFIRM FIRST THAT THIS WAS THE PROPERTY OWNED BY GENERAL SOGLO. CHARGE REPLIED THAT IT WAS.

2. WHEN CHARGE INQUIRED CONCERNING CONTEXT IN WHICH INSPECTION WOULD BE MADE, DIRGEN SAID HE WAS NOT AT LIBERTY TO SAY ANY MORE ABOUT THE MATTER. CHARGE SAID THAT HE KNEW OF INSTANCES WHERE A LANDLORD OF DIPLOMATIC PROPERTY HAD INSPECTED CHANCERIES OR RESIDENCES TO ENSURE THAT THEY WERE IN GOOD REPAIR BUT THAT INSPECTION DESIRED BY GPRB DID NOT SEEM TO FALL WITHIN THAT CATEGORY. HE SAID THAT HE WOULD INFORM WASHINGTON OF SITUATION BEFORE GIVING ANY RESPONSE TO FOREIGN MINISTRY.

3. COMMENT: FOR PAST THREE YEARS GPRB HAS BEEN TRYING TO

EVICT RESIDENTS OF AREAS SURROUNDING CAMP GUEZO ON GROUNDS THAT THEY WOULD BE IN DANGER IF THE CAMP WERE ATTACKED.

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IN FACT, GPRB HAS BEEN LOOKING FOR REASONS TO SEIZE PROPERTIES WHICH ARE AMONG BEST MAINTAINED IN COTONOU, TO TURN THEM OVER TO CABINET AND CENTRAL COMMITTEE MEMBERS. CHANCERY LANDLORD AND FORMER PRESIDENT OF DAHOMEY, GENERAL SOGLO, HAS TOLD GPRB CATEGORICALLY THAT HE WILL NOT MOVE AND THAT, IF NECESSARY, HE PLANS TO DIE PROTECTING HIS HOUSE. IN PAST HE HAS REFUSED TO GIVE GPRB PLANS OF BUILDINGS

HE OWNS IN THIS AREA, SPECIFICALLY, HIS OWN HOUSE WHICH IS ADJACENT TO EMBASSY COMPOUND AND PUBLIC AFFAIRS OFFICER RESIDENCE. GPRB, THEREFORE, IS PROBABLY GOING OVER HIS HEAD TO EMBASSY.

4. OUR FEELING IS THAT SUCH REQUEST, BOTH IN ITSELF AND IN THE MANNER IN WHICH IT WAS CONVEYED, IS HIGHLY IRREGULAR. AT MINIMUM IT SHOULD HAVE COME IN FORM OF DIPLOMATIC NOTE SETTING FORTH SPECIFIC REASONS FOR GPRB SEEKING INSPECTION. BELIEVE THAT WE SHOULD INSIST ON DIPLOMATIC NOTE AND FORMAL EXPLANATION BEFORE GIVING REQUEST FURTHER CONSIDERATION. WOULD APPRECIATE DEPARTMENT'S SUGGESTIONS. THOMPSON

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